

**Consumer Health Information Service:  
Best Practices in Public Library  
Interviews with Public Library Managers**

**Kent County Libraries**

LIBRARY⇒	K1	K2	K3
QUESTIONS↓			
What kinds of health questions do your patrons ask?	Medical tests they are scheduled for and prescription medications.	Have not heard a lot. Many people are getting help from the Internet. We're not researching questions like we used to. We advertise that Patty comes and we see her with people.	Come in and ask where to find the books. Pregnancy, cancer, medications, medical tests. We're across from Christiana Care so people come here after their medical appointments.
Do you get a lot of health questions?	Not as many as we used to. It's hard to tell because people don't always ask for our help. We don't have a sense of whether they are using good websites.	No, not very many.	Yes, about 20 per month. I direct them to quite a few books and websites.
In which subject areas is your health collection the strongest?	We have some periodicals, especially in area of natural health—a big interest. Some reference materials and databases from the state.	Reference and 600s. Databases provided by the state. I believe the collection is sufficient. We're not into reference books like we used to be but also we're not as extensive now with the Internet.	We just got some new books. We have a little bit of everything. Not enough on blood tests [understanding lab values].
What health subjects would you like to improve in your collection?	The whole health collection overall. I wish I had more money for a broader health collection and could update sources more often.	With the person in Dover and databases provided we are well covered. Patty is good at getting back to people.	We are trying to build slow but sure. Wish we had more books on medical tests, Alzheimer's disease. Pregnancy books always in demand and they walk. We are trying to build a reference collection but there is not enough money. Reference books are good because they are easy to copy.
What are some of the online resources you turn to for answering health questions?	Hard to recall. We have the databases saved in 'favorites.' I usually send people directly to an association's website like the American Cancer Society.	I just go online and Google or go to WebMD and see what comes up for that subject.	Yahoo or Google
Use Delaware "Go Local?"	No, I am not familiar with it.	No	No
How frequently do your patrons need more detailed information than what is available at your library? How do you handle those situations?	There have been times when we didn't have items on the shelf but it is infrequent that a patron will come to the desk to say there is nothing there. They just leave. I have called the reference desk at Dover PL and had then suggest resources. They can go out of system	If that happens, we have the advantage of having the consumer health librarian in Dover. We would not let people just leave if they feel they have not been served.	Direct them to the Internet when they come in asking for latest on MRIs and stuff they see on tv. We direct them to Medline or we Google it.

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	and even out of state to get stuff for people.		
Using a scale of Very Often, Sometimes, or Rarely, how frequently do you refer patrons to the following sources/services when they need more information?			
--Local health or human services agency	Sometimes, a state agency for counseling, for example. Only to the local agencies we know of.	Very likely	Very often because the collection is not up-to-date
--Area hospital or medical library	We haven't done that—we can access those resources through Patty.	Very likely	Rarely
--Consumer health librarian in your county	We do that. She is very accessible and easy to work with and quick with her answers.	Very likely	We tell them a lot. She comes on Wednesdays and we show them how they can mail in for help. Sometimes people want her to mail info here for pick up, rather than to patron's home, especially if it is private.
--Delaware Academy of Medicine	Only through Patty.	Through the consumer health librarian.	No
What kinds of health/medical reference training opportunities have been provided to you and/or your coworkers?	Only about what databases are online. Nothing health related. Workshops would be a good idea so we know what's necessary for our collections and what's new online.	I took reference course in the past but none recently. We pick it up on our own.	State library has come in to talk to us about general reference databases. The county lady came in to show us different sites.
What is the nature of your contact or relationship with Delaware's Consumer Health Information Service?	She is in the building once a month. People are getting used to the fact that she is here. There are brochures for people to contact her directly.	See her once a month but we can have contact in between.	Good, very good. She comes in once a month from 10-12. We ask her for help with questions. We can always call her or email. She is easy to reach.
What is your overall impression of Delaware's Consumer Health Information Service?	Better than it's ever been. The librarian comes and spends time answering questions. In the past it was all very remote.	It is as good as how we use it. When we've used it, it has been good. One morning a month is not sufficient to get it going. This was something of a trial—not sure it has taken hold. Probably better in Dover.	Good—we like it. We use it often.
Are there ways in which Delaware's Consumer Health Information Service could be more helpful to you, your coworkers and/or your patrons?	If we had more training. Things change so quickly. We could use training so we know we're pointing them [patrons] in the right direction.	I don't think so. It would be good to have more informational kits so people would understand the service. Now I think it's just a brochure.	No, I think she is doing everything she can. She has even donated books. Leaves us a lot of brochures that we display. She refreshes the displays.
Does your library provide any public programs or outreach related to health information?	We have done programs, but not regularly. Nutrition for cancer patients, parenting classes, health issues for small children. No outreach—all staff is needed to keep the building open.	At times. Right now a diabetes clinic is here once a month. I take what is offered. No outreach.	Every so often. I can't remember off the top of my head. Speakers call us. Once a month I write a column and do press releases. I let them know she [the health librarian] is here. We only

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			have 6 employees, 2 FT, so we can't really do outreach.
What are the greatest challenges that you and/or your coworkers face when helping patrons with health questions?	Trying to get patrons to trust us enough to tell us their questions. No place private to talk. We're small and we know everyone—it may be why people don't come to library for health questions.	Being assured that we give patrons the right info—head them in the right direction. We have one staffer who is better at health questions—she enjoys it.	We don't have a list [of health websites] on paper. It would be helpful to have a list of links--which sites for what—that patrons could visit. Having enough reference materials. I send out for pamphlets--smoking, Alzheimer's, mental health, depression--but we need more. These are good, easy references for people. Parents need more on teens and teen suicide.
Is there anything I should know about health information at your library that I have not asked about?	Patty was great about going through the collection and talking to us about what to update. People are not looking for specific major reference titles like family medical guides and the PDR.	No	I would like to know how to get more pamphlets. Some are free but others we pay for. Giveaways are appreciated. We have pamphlet pockets on the wall and we like to keep them packed.

### New Castle County Libraries

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QUESTIONS↓			
What kinds of health questions do your patrons ask?	Come straight from their doctor's office w/ specific disease, sometimes only half of the name. Cancer, heart disease, diabetes. Sometimes they are caring for someone and need to know what they should be doing, cooking, or prohibiting. Others: pregnancy, ADHD, Asperger's Syndrome, and students doing a report. Also, environmental concerns related to home products and safety.	Two kinds. 1) Personal when they've just come from the doctor's office and want more information. Want more info on surgery or a symptom. 2) Students doing assignments & needing multiple sources of information.	Consumer health oriented—people come after their doctor's appointment seeking additional info about a disease. Also, self-help, weight loss, info about a child's condition, "my child has x and I don't understand it."
Do you get a lot of health questions?	A fair number—not overwhelming. I personally refer at least one question to Susan every day. We have a younger population—lots of parents w/ children.	Not, not really. Maybe 1-2 per day.	Yes-medium. We have really tried to beef up our collection to respond.
In which subject areas is your health collection the strongest?	With Susan working here, we usually have books on all of the topics people ask us about. She's helped us bulk up on key topics. We don't have space so we keep it weeded—	Books, especially popular circulating for diabetes, cancer, drug abuse, alcohol. We wean people to reference for specifics. We have a good reference collection and	It's good overall. Our adult librarian has done a heavy weeding of the collection and ordered on a broad range of topics.

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	this is another area she's helped us with.	good databases. When we don't have a book on a specific topic we go online.	
What health subjects would you like to improve in your collection?	No real deficiency, just a constant need to monitor and buy. We do see a lot of nursing students from Del Tech—their library doesn't have weekend hours. They need journals and texts beyond our scope. This is not an area I think we want to start collecting in	The way we do it now is best—buy circ books on popular health topics, basic care. We have enough resources—people want to look up things fast, not to check out a lot of books.	Nothing in particular—our circ and ref collections cover a broad range of topics.
What are some of the online resources you turn to for answering health questions?	Susan has given us a list and I pull that out. We have a very busy reference desk here so there really are not opportunities to help people extensively with web searching.	My favorite is MedlinePlus. It's usually the only one I use.	To the Delaware of Academy site. Each librarian has favorites. Depends on who you ask. We use the Ebsco database. I try to go to the organizations that support the particular problem (e.g., American Cancer Society, Lupus Society). I think that is helpful information to pass on to patrons.
Use Delaware "Go Local?"	Yes, when it first opened.	? I don't know it.	I have looked at it a little and passed it on to some patrons. It did not seem comprehensive. I need to spend more time looking at it.
How frequently do your patrons need more detailed information than what is available at your library? How do you handle those situations?	Again, we are very busy so we are quick to refer patrons to Susan. If she is not in the building, we tell patrons who she is and that she would like to help them. Most are willing to accept the referral. Some just want what they can get on the spot. We can't give private 1:1 extended service when Susan is not available.	Rarely. What we do have are nursing students who need more than what is in our databases. They are looking for textbooks b/c they don't want to purchase them.	Not too often. People come in for general knowledge, to gain a comfort level. We would offer to get information through ILL.
Using a scale of Very Often, Sometimes, or Rarely, how frequently do you refer patrons to the following sources/services when they need more information?			
--Local health or human services agency	Sometimes	Rarely	Fairly minimal. There are situations with mental health issues when we would pass on information (e.g., shelters).
--Area hospital or medical library	Rarely—they are intimidating so we refer to Susan instead.	Rarely—only upon request which has happened only once or twice.	We refer to UDel and Academy of Medicine occasionally.
--Consumer health librarian in your	Often, especially since she is here.	Rarely, people want answers on the spot.	Occasionally. We pass info on but I

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county			have not offered to contact her on a patron's behalf. We are more likely to call on her for information about health-related programs. 1:1 reference not as much. It has not become our habit. We need publicity and a procedure in place for how to put patrons in touch with her. We don't know if we should give out her phone number or email.
--Delaware Academy of Medicine	We did that a lot in the past but now it all goes through Susan. She is the pathway.	Never	Sometimes
What kinds of health/medical reference training opportunities have been provided to you and/or your coworkers?	Susan has done some training on online databases for staff and the public. I did something at the state some years ago.	Workshops on the databases were offered to two librarians and the manager.	We try to take advantage of training at the state library. We use databases they provide. We haven't had any in recent years. We have not set up training with the consumer health librarian here. It would be more effective if she would set up training and say "this is what we're offering" rather than say "I'm happy to do training if you need it." We would send staff for training if it was scheduled.
What is the nature of your contact or relationship with Delaware's Consumer Health Information Service?	We have a more immediate relationship with her because she is here. We rely heavily on her assistance. She is very accessible.	I'm not sure what the relationship is. She offers training. Not much contact. A lack of knowledge—I have not really looked into it.	She works part time out of one of our libraries. Responsive in helping us set up programs. She comes here for Wellness weekday. There is not a complete awareness. We have not absorbed the fact that she is available to help with patron questions.
What is your overall impression of Delaware's Consumer Health Information Service?	I've got nothing to base it on because we are dealing directly with the provider, Susan. I know there is an effort to convey the importance of good consumer health information. When we tell people about the kind of help Susan can provide, they are willing to work with her, even if she is not available on the spot.	That it is a great resource and I should learn more about it. The librarian comes here and does her little programs. We're not promoting it enough. Not sure there is enough interest by the public.	I think it's good. I would be comfortable referring and know they would get more help than we can give. I personally have a good feeling about it but it is not foremost in our minds. We could use a yearly update on how the service works, how to make referrals.
Are there ways in which Delaware's Consumer Health Information Service could be more helpful to you,	We benefit by having the physical presence—other libraries probably don't have the same feeling. Continued training is	I would love to receive resources—a librarian-developed list of resources I can hand to the public. People like to leave	Reminders that it is there so we would remember to tell our patrons that it is there for them.

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your coworkers and/or your patrons?	important—we don't have the vocabulary. Someone to help us make sure the book collections are up-to-date. Must pay attention to medical opinions that change so frequently.	with a pamphlet, factoids.	
Does your library provide any public programs or outreach related to health information?	We have, over the years, brought in medical people who offer programs. Programs on financial issues are more in demand than health programs. We don't go out to fairs and community events. Most of them are on Saturdays and we're open 7 days/week and don't have enough staff to send anyone out.	We recently had a program on health—low attendance at these public programs. Need to gauge what people are interested in. I think people are busy and want to be entertained at library programs. So far we haven't done a lot of outreach but we should. We are located in a community center w/ health agencies. We have no regular contact with them but that would be a good idea.	Quite a bit of programming. No particular outreach. We could set up a program at the senior center for online health information but that would be more the area of expertise from the DAM or the consumer health librarian.
What are the greatest challenges that you and/or your coworkers face when helping patrons with health questions?	Our own education—words and terms we are not familiar with. We do need more training. And time is always it. Our patrons need more time and we don't always have it to give. Sometimes we can, it depends on the time of day.	Trying to keep it from getting too personal. Patrons want to tell us too much—sometimes they are seeking advice. The databases can be a little challenging; people need a lot of help and instruction to use them.	There is always that feeling that patrons want us to give them a diagnosis. We stress that we cannot give them medical advice. Sometimes the information is too difficult to understand. Sometimes people just want a friendly face. We hear about stuff in much greater detail than we want to. We have to learn how to be empathetic but also pull back. Some staff is more experienced at staying on top of resources. Some go straight to reference books and others to the Internet. The challenge is knowing if everyone [on staff] is providing the same level of service and using the same spectrum of sources.
Is there anything I should know about health information at your library that I have not asked about?	No. We are probably dealing with issues similar to other libraries of the same size.	No	We have a pretty strong collection because one of our librarians puts a strong focus on health. The consumer health librarian was impressed with our collection. We've had a pretty good materials budget though lately we've had to spend more money on part-time staff and it has eaten into our materials budget a little.

## Sussex County Libraries

LIBRARY⇒	S1	S2	S3
QUESTIONS↓			
What kinds of health questions do your patrons ask?	Medicaid and Medicare. Looking for resources on diabetes and diagnoses. Also pregnancy & those books don't come back.	General, basic info. Person just got a diagnosis or new medication and wants to know more. Use the PDR. There is interest in alternative medicine, especially among the Mennonite community.	Usually related to conditions and diseases. Also nutrition and fitness.
Do you get a lot of health questions?	Depends on time of year. 7-10 per month.	No, not that I sense. A couple a month.	May get a question or two. Not always a specific question but "do you have books on x."
In which subject areas is your health collection the strongest?	Pregnancy, diabetes, diseases.	Cancer. We're mindful when we purchase that many people are diagnosed with cancer. I recently weeded out diabetes books that were donated. They were pristine and unused, but too old.	Print collection—we manage this the most, but not well recently. We have access to databases through the state. Trying to fill in gaps with help of Linda Leonard.
What health subjects would you like to improve in your collection?	All diseases. And pregnancy. We would like to have something on pregnancy we could give people to keep.	We really want to give attention to all areas.	All subjects. It's been awhile since we've concentrated on health—the collection is aging.
What are some of the online resources you turn to for answering health questions?	Databases are fantastic—they come from the Division. We are using them a lot. We try to stay away from general Internet searches. Staff is unsure of which sites are viable so we stick with the databases.	WebMD. I recommend this to my staff. I think there are some NIH resources but I've never used them. I've used WebMD—it's accurate. I don't know if we have a health database. Only Ebsco general magazine articles.	WebMD
Use Delaware "Go Local?"	No	I haven't looked at it.	Yes, but I forget it exists.
How frequently do your patrons need more detailed information than what is available at your library? How do you handle those situations?	Doesn't happen very often. A couple of times Linda has been here to take on those questions. Delmar is a very private place—people don't bother asking, they look on their own.	It does happen. I encourage our patrons to go into more depth. It's important that they know. We used to send requests to the Academy but now we take the patron to the Internet and counsel them on the best sites. Also refer patrons to our health librarian if they can wait for the visit.	Occasionally. We refer them to Linda. We have Nanticoke Library near but they no longer have a consumer health librarian. We refer to Linda—there is a form or we email her with a question and the patron's contact information.
Using a scale of Very Often, Sometimes, or Rarely, how frequently do you refer patrons to the following sources/services when they need more information?			
--Local health or human services agency	Sometimes, if we have pamphlets from the local agency and/or we are aware of the agency.	Rarely	Rarely

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--Area hospital or medical library	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely
--Consumer health librarian in your county	Yes, we do that. We give out her number or pass along a question. But we don't think patrons follow-up on the referral.	More frequently	Sometimes
--Delaware Academy of Medicine	No	Not as often anymore. We don't really do that anymore.	Rarely
What kinds of health/medical reference training opportunities have been provided to you and/or your coworkers?	If there have been any, I don't know of them. They tend to be further north. Training in Dover doesn't make sense for us. We don't have the coverage—1.5 hour drive each way for a 2 hour training program is not viable.	Some but not enough. Someone from the Academy came to a meeting once to talk about what they do there. It was not very helpful.	We've had a year or so ago an introduction to MedlinePlus/WebMD training. It was coordinated by the Delaware Division of Libraries in a central location.
What is the nature of your contact or relationship with Delaware's Consumer Health Information Service?	I don't know if it's a relationship. We are aware and we consider her a resource and we have no problems talking to her. She's helping us with our collection. I don't think she is being used by our patrons because of the type of community we are [private].	Very, very good. Helpful. Forthcoming, offers before we ask. Comes 1x per month. Contact in between only if we need it.	It's pretty good. Linda is helpful and gets back timely. Comes once a month and keeps us up-to-date. Mostly works with staff, showing us resources or helping with patron questions we bring her.
What is your overall impression of Delaware's Consumer Health Information Service?	I think it's a good service and is better used in other places. Maybe we need to create programs and see how they go over. We'd like to have a health fair but don't know if we would have a turnout.	They have got a good thing started. Would like to see them do more—spend more time in our library. More promotion is needed—it's like a hidden treasure.	Terrific. Excellent to have a go-to resource. So nice to know there is an authority we can go to—a partner for us.
Are there ways in which Delaware's Consumer Health Information Service could be more helpful to you, your coworkers and/or your patrons?	I don't know. She's here, it's advertised, we can provide a quiet place, it's just not working.	More time here and more promotion w/ understanding that they are there to answer questions objectively and in full confidence.	Instant message reference or health reference tied to Question Point. If we could instantly answer questions it would be better than "someone will get back to you." With the consumer health service, we make the contact for the patrons, but they [patrons] don't want to be referred or to have to wait for an answer.
Does your library provide any public programs or outreach related to health information?	Have had general q&a programs for health info topics w/ pamphlets and resources. Poor attendance.	We just had a program on showing people how to organize their medical record. We have the mammogram van. Try to offer something quarterly. Outreach—health info outreach only included within general outreach—we don't do much outreach except to children (schools, daycare).	Occasionally an adult program, talks on medical topics, holistic topics. 1-2 per year. Rarely do we get out.
What are the greatest challenges that you and/or your coworkers face when helping patrons with health	Getting them to ask those questions—people are in the stacks but would rather browse than ask. Staff do not feel prepared to help	Finding info people need when they don't know what they need. They can't verbalize what they need. Things are	Up-to-date resources for patron needs. Getting to the exact information patrons want. Are we



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questions?	with most [health] questions patrons have. We don't have a good list of resources.	changing quickly. Internet is great but people need something in print they can take home. If we don't have it, they have to wait. We don't have shelf space or budget to have enough print materials. Annie said we should weed but didn't say there would be money to replace books. There is a real gap there and that is the most important thing.	giving medical advice when the patron doesn't know what question to ask? Time to work with people to be sure they get the right sources.
Is there anything I should know about health information at your library that I have not asked about?	Even though we are a Delaware library, ½ of our patrons come from Maryland.	I've seen a trend—seems like docs are more aware of providing info—even the pharmacists, but they are rushed and don't have time to explain.	We have a shelf with brochures, including health brochures.